



Memorandum

TO: RULES COMMITTEE

FROM: Councilmember Sam Liccardo
Councilmember Rose Herrera

**SUBJECT: MICRO-HOUSING:
ANOTHER TOOL IN THE
BATTLE AGAINST HOMELESSNESS**

DATE: April 23, 2014

Approved *Sam Liccardo P.P. Rose Herrera* ^{mg} Date 04/23/14

RECOMMENDATION:

Direct the City Manager to evaluate the feasibility of temporarily constructing “tiny houses” on underutilized public land or “micropods” in empty warehouses as an option for transitional housing for homeless individuals. Examine housing codes, explore funding options, assess issues relating to conditional permits or temporary zoning, and examine the feasibility and challenges of managing “micro-villages” or micro-pods. Add this item to the Community and Economic Development Committee workplan.

DISCUSSION:

We have become painfully aware that San Jose has one of the largest unsheltered homeless populations in the U.S.. In recent years, we have launched a coordinated effort to reduce the homeless population and the impacts of homelessness on our community. Through the coordination of Destination: Home and its “Housing 1000” effort, our nonprofit, City, County, and Housing Authority partners have placed more than 620 of our most vulnerable and chronic homeless into housing.

We recently took action on progressive measures aimed at offering additional tools to address transitional housing for our homeless population. The momentum that is being felt towards addressing homelessness and housing needs has pushed us forward, however, we still need more tools in our toolbox.

A tiny house is a relatively inexpensive short term housing option for the homeless. Tiny houses are being built at about 100 – 150 square feet in size and can cost as little as \$5,000 to build. Placed together on underutilized land, a collection of very small, economically cheap houses can become a tiny village that can be managed and maintained, offering another humane option for housing our vulnerable homeless population while long term housing options are sought.

This concept is not new. In Wisconsin, local authorities are utilizing high school and construction trade schools to help build micro-cottages for as little as \$3,000 per house. A “micro-cottage” community in Olympia, Washington, was featured in a February 20, 2014 *New York Times* article, and similar initiatives appear to be catching on nationally.

Other similar micro-housing options appear worth exploring. Locally, Dick Brown of Ni-KoTech proposes emulating the idea of micro pods that have been used in Asia for some time: self-contained units, including a bed, storage area, fan, and air filter system that can be placed 20 – 30 at a time in vacant warehouses as short-term, low-cost housing options for the homeless.

CONCLUSION:

In a city of very scarce public resources, and a challenge as daunting as homelessness, we must continue to press to be more resourceful, more creative, and more innovative with our public dollars. Micro-housing may serve as a critical option for doing so.